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Food and Home Notes

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Don't dig into potatoes--make parings thin. The dark green outer leaves of cabbage, lettuce, and other leafy green vegetables are high in nutrients--according to U.S. Department of Agriculture specialists. Don't discard those leaves unless they are wilted or tough.

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But--on kale--remove woody midribs from the kale leaves--there is little loss of nutritive value and the kale will taste better.

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If you're "french frying"--do not overload the fry basket because if too much food is put into the basket at one time, the temperature of the fat drops excessively, cooking slows down, and the vegetable absorbs more fat.

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What is caciocavallo cheese? It has a somewhat salty flavor. It's similar to Provolone but not smoked; has a smooth, very firm texture, light or white interior, and a clay colored tan surface.

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Always store dried vegetables in tightly closed containers in a cool, dry, place.

A BOCKWURST FAN

Like bockwurst? According to the new standards adopted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, you'll be able to order "bockwurst" anywhere in the United States and get the same basic kind of product. Of course, there are slight variations allowed for geographic differences. But, by and large, you'll know the product by its composition.

Bockwurst is an uncured sausage-like product that comes in a casing or link form. It can be either cooked or uncooked, and is traditionally made from meat, eggs, vegetables, and seasoning. (Not to be confused with knockwurst, which is smoked).

The Animal Plant Health Inspection Service of USDA regulations requires that bockwurst now contain at least 70% (or more) meat--either all pork, or a combination of pork, beef and/or veal. In addition, it must contain whole eggs that are either fresh, frozen or dried, as well as onions, chives, parsley, and leeks--alone, or in any combination.

If any extenders or binders are included, the label must prominently identify the product to say "cereal added".

SALMONELLA

Salmonella bacteria are most often found in fresh poultry and red meat, although the disease can also be transmitted by persons, pets and recreational waters. Salmonellosis (the disease) can be prevented by proper, sanitary, careful habits, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture specialists.

Federal and State inspection laws have been designed to assure the consumer that meat and poultry products are wholesome and properly labeled, thus helping to guard against foodborne illness caused by bacteria or insanitary processing. However -- the incidence of foodborne illness continues to be of great concern. According to reports by USDA's Economic Research Service, foodborne illness often may be traced to foods prepared or eaten in the home.

Salmonellosis is one of the leading communicable disease problems of bacterial origin in the United States--conservatively estimated at about 2 million cases a year.

A preliminary USDA report summarizing the major findings in a survey of consumers' opinions and attitudes towards safety in food preparation has been published. A complete report is being prepared but, the following results indicate the self-protection measures homemakers considered in the preparation of foods.

Homemakers were asked about chopping meat for a stew, and chopping vegetables for a fresh salad with the same knife and cutting board. The majority of homemakers did not give the right response to this hypothetical situation. After cutting up fresh meat, the knife, the cutting board, and the homemakers' hands should be washed with soap and water -- and, then the vegetables could be chopped with the same knife and on the same board.

Why "only that way"? The fresh meat has been in contact with the knife, the cutting board and the homemakers' hands. It is possible that all are now contaminated. As mentioned earlier salmonella can be found on fresh meat and poultry.

—And "Cross Contamination"

Salmonella on fresh meat and poultry can be killed— If these foods are cooked properly. However —there is a danger that salmonella from these products can spread("cross contaminate") when the homemaker prepares them in conjunction with other foods. How to avoid this? The knife, the cutting board, your hands, all, must be thoroughly washed with soap and hot water (mere rinsing is not sufficient) before you chop the salad vegetables. Otherwise these bacteria can be transferred over to the vegetables, and you wind up eating a fresh vegetable salad teeming with salmonella.

Most homemakers who were interviewed in this survey did not indicate that they were aware that current government inspection procedures do not include provisions for testing for the presence of salmonella on fresh meat and poultry products. Some consumers are unaware that absolute protection is not always attainable. Most meat and poultry are government inspected—but not all. Apparently, however, this is not clear to all consumers.

The homemakers responsibility must not be underrated. The homemaker needs to be concerned—and needs to be sure of her part in the hygienic food preparation in the home. "Cross Contamination" can be avoided — if you are aware of the possibilities and avoid the problems.



GOOD THINGS IN BIG PACKAGES

Who said good things come in little packages only? Not so. Take nonfat dry milk for instance. It's a big package that offers big economy in a lot of ways. It can make your food dollar perform the work of two.

U.S. Department of Agriculture reports indicate that commercial stocks of nonfat dry milk have doubled in the last year. (Total volume now 114,988,000 pounds.) That represents an increase of 103 percent over last year and 118 percent above the 3-year average for the same month, March.

Marketing specialists with USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service cite several advantages in using nonfat dry milk. It's inexpensive. It stores easily with a shelf life of about 6 months. It requires no special storage except to keep it in a dry cool place. It can be reconstituted instantly so it is always ready when you need it. It avoids waste if you mix only what you need. Once reconstituted it should be refrigerated. They say not to freeze it.

The product has multiple uses. While the most well-known use is as a beverage, it can be used easily for cooking and baking. In baking, just mix the dry milk with the dry ingredients. Use water to fill liquid measures called for in the recipe.

It can be used for ice cream, frozen desserts, or whipped for a dessert topping. It can go into any dish where milk is called for. To whip instant nonfat dry milk, use equal amounts of instant nonfat dry milk and liquid, such as 1/2 cup instant dry milk and 1/2 cup of water or fruit juice. You'll have a dessert topping with the consistency of whipped cream. The colder the liquid, the faster the product will whip.

NOTE: Additional information for the MEDIA and photographs (when applicable) may be obtained from: Shirley Wagener, Editor of Food and Home Notes, Room 535-A, Office of Communication /Press Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Or telephone 202-447-5898
